



Avondale lauds legislators for I-10 work

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The Arizona Republic

Oct. 18, 2007 08:56 AM

The Avondale City Council invited West Valley legislators to City Hall this week to thank and honor them for working to accelerate the widening of Interstate 10.

For two years, the city worked with state lawmakers from legislative Districts 12, 13 and 23 to make I-10 safer for commuters, said Avondale Mayor Marie Lopez Rogers.

"Accelerating the widening of I-10 has been a priority of this city just as it has been for these legislators present this evening," Rogers said at Monday's council meeting.

The mayor singled out Rep. John Nelson, R-Glendale, for adding an amendment to a transportation bill in the legislative session that appropriated \$10 million to cover interest for the project in order to speed up the widening of the freeway through the Southwest Valley. Nelson was given a huge plaque honoring his efforts, while all the other legislators received smaller plaques.

The other lawmakers honored were Sens. Robert Blendu, R-Litchfield Park; Richard Miranda, D-Phoenix; and Rebecca Rios, D-Hayden; and Reps. Jim Weiers, R-Glendale; Barbara McGuire, D-Kearney; Martha Garcia, D-Phoenix; Steve Gallardo, D-Phoenix; and Pete Rios, D-Hayden.

City Councilman Jim Buster said he spent a lot of hours in discussions with Blendu and Nelson, and he said it was the broad support from the other West Valley legislators that got the money appropriated.

"The West Valley flexed some political muscle, but . . . teamwork was ultimately what got it done," he said.

Councilman Ken Weise said the city invested almost \$200,000 in staff time, resources and lobbying in Washington, D.C., to help make the freeway acceleration happen. He said he couldn't imagine how much time the legislators spent on the issue.

"It was a coalition led by you that made all this happen," he said.

Nelson agreed it was a cooperative effort by Republicans and Democrats that got the job done.

"As most of you know, no one person gets anything done singularly, particularly at the Legislature, and I would assume it's the same thing here at the council level," he said.

Nelson praised the bipartisan effort of the legislators.

"If we work together, we can accomplish a lot more," Blendu added. "This is a great beginning."

Sen. Rebecca Rios said Avondale was blessed to be represented by both Democrats and Republicans.

"The bottom line I want everybody to remember is, this is going to save lives," Weiers said of the fast-tracked freeway expansion. "It's really easy to do the right thing, and I think that is what we accomplished."

While the Legislature was able to appropriate the \$10 million for the accelerated widening, Avondale, Litchfield Park and Goodyear didn't get the entire amount, after a power play by Phoenix lowered the amount of money for the freeway work.

The Maricopa Association of Governments voted to only partially reimburse the cities for the acceleration. While the Legislature earmarked the \$10 million, MAG cities led by Phoenix decided the three Southwest Valley cities should pitch in almost \$2.7 million from their general funds.

That led to bickering among the three cities - Avondale and Litchfield Park against Goodyear - over how to split the costs. But they eventually reached an agreement.

Construction is expected to begin early next year, about four years ahead of schedule.

The stretch of I-10 between Loop 101 and Sarival Road that is the target of the widening is congested and dangerous. The three cities have sought to widen the freeway to five lanes in each direction, up from as few as two lanes in each direction.

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